

# THE IDEA OF A LEAGUE OF NATIONS

*Prolegomena to the Study of  
World-Organization*

BY

RESEARCH COMMITTEE OF THE  
LEAGUE OF NATIONS UNION



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# THE IDEA OF A LEAGUE OF NATIONS

## I

### ‘WORLD-PEACE OR DOWNFALL’

THE idea of a unification of human affairs, to the extent at least of a cessation of war and a world-wide rule of international law, is by no means new; it can be traced through many centuries of history. It is found as an acceptable commonplace in a fragment, *De Republica*, of Cicero.<sup>1</sup> It has, indeed, appeared in, and passed out of, the foreground of thought, and reappeared there, again and again.

Hitherto, however, if only on account of the limitations of geographical knowledge, the project has seldom been truly world-wide, though in some instances it has compre-

<sup>1</sup> ‘Nec erit alia lex Romae, alia Athenis; alia nunc, alia posthac; sed et omnes gentes, et omni tempore una lex, et sempiterna, et immortalis continebit; unusque erit communis quasi magister et imperator omnium Deus,’ Cicero, *De Republica*, Lib. iii. Cicero probably derived the thought from the Stoics. Stoicism insisted strongly upon the idea of a city of God. The idea is clear in Posidonius, Cicero’s teacher. It is as old as Zeno, the founder of the School. Plutarch reports the latter as saying that ‘men ought not to live in separate πόλεις (States) and demes, with separate laws and customs, but should regard one another as all *ἐνμπόλιται καὶ ἐνδῆμοται* and there should be one order, as of a single flock feeding in a common pasture’ (*νόμος*, which in Greek also means law).

hended practically all the known world. Almost always there has been an excluded fringe of barbarians and races esteemed as less than men. The Roman Empire realized the idea in a limited sphere and in a mechanical, despotic fashion. It was inherent in the propaganda of Islam—excluding the unbeliever. It was the dream of the mediaeval Church—a dream which, partly in harmony, partly in rivalry, with the mediaeval Empire, it was constantly trying to realize, however ineffectually. (But here again the line was drawn against the infidel.) It may be said that the political unity of Christendom overriding states and nations was the orthodox and typical doctrine of the Middle Ages. The individual States were regarded as, in the nature of things, members of one great body politic, presided over by the Pope or the Emperor, or both.<sup>1</sup> It was the idea of the world-supremacy of the Empire that inspired Dante's *De Monarchia*; but, as Lord Bryce has remarked, 'Dante's book was an epilogue instead of prophecy'. The Council of Constance (1414-18) brought together the Christian princes of all countries, the higher dignitaries of the Church, the ambassadors of many cities, and the most celebrated scholars of the age, with the Pope and the Emperor at their head; it was, however, the last assemblage of the whole of Western Christendom.<sup>2</sup>

It cannot be claimed that history has shown any continuously progressive movement of human affairs from a dispersed to a unified condition. Rather, it tells a story of the oscillating action of separatist and unifying forces. And the process of civilization itself, if we use the word in its narrower and older sense of the elaboration of citizenship in a political and social organization, and exclude mechanical

<sup>1</sup> For a poetical utterance of this idea see the great monologue of Charles V in Victor Hugo's *Hernani*.

<sup>2</sup> See Dr. Jacob ter Meulen, *The Idea of International Organization in its Development*, Part I (The Hague, 1917).

and scientific progress from it, has on the whole been rather on the side of fragmentation. It was, for example, much easier for loosely organized tribes and village communities scattered over wide areas to coalesce into vague and often very extensive ‘ nations ’, like the Scythians and Thracians, or to co-operate in ‘ amphictyonies ’ or federations like the small peoples of central Greece, than for highly developed city states or fully organized monarchies, possessing a distinctive culture and religion and definite frontiers, to sink these things in any larger union. For such higher forms of political organization, enlargement occurred mainly through conquest, which created unstable empire systems of subject and subordinate peoples, under the sway—which might of course be the assimilative sway—of a dominant nation, rather than real unifications.

The Renaissance presents a phase in history in which a large vague unification (Christendom) is seen to be breaking up, simultaneously with the appearance of a higher grade of national organization. Machiavelli (says Ter Meulen) may be conveniently taken as the typical exponent of the new mental forces which ultimately turned Europe towards the conception of more or less absolute princes with highly organized standing armies (see his *Art of War*), national religions, and educational autonomy. Machiavelli, with his aspiration towards a united Italy, involving a disintegration of the Empire, opened the phase of the national state in Europe, which reached its fullest development in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Before the Renaissance, Europe was far more of a unity than it was at the close of the reign of Queen Victoria, when it consisted mainly of a group of nations, with their national edges sharpened and hardened almost to a maximum, each aspiring to empire and each actually suspicious of and hostile to its neighbours. The idea of international organization for peace seemed far more Utopian to the normal

European intelligence in 1900 than it would have seemed eight hundred years before.<sup>1</sup>

But while these political and social developments that constitute civilization in the narrower sense of the word were tending to make human societies, as they become more elaborately organized, more heterogeneous and mutually unsympathetic, there were also coming into play throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for the first time, upon a quite unprecedented scale, another series of forces diametrically opposed to human separations. They worked, however, mutely, because the world of thought was unprepared for them. Unprecedented advances in technical and scientific knowledge were occurring, and human co-operation and the reaction of man upon man, not only in material but also in mental things, was being made enormously more effective than it had ever been before. But the phrases of international relationship were not altering to correspond. Phrases usually follow after rather than anticipate reality; and so it was that, at the outbreak of the great war in August 1914, Europe and the world awoke out of a dream of intensified nationality to a new system of realities that were entirely antagonistic to the continuance of national separations.

It is necessary to state very plainly the nature of these new forces. Upon them rests the whole case for the League of Nations as it is here presented. It is argued here that these forces give us powers novel in history, and bring mankind face to face with dangers such as they have never before encountered. It is maintained that, on the one hand, they render possible such a reasoned co-ordination of human affairs as has never hitherto been conceivable, and that, on the other, they so enlarge and intensify the scope and evil of war and of international hostility as to

<sup>1</sup> Even the class cosmopolitanism of the French-speaking 'gentleman' had been effaced by the Revolution and the Napoleonic wars.

give what was formerly a generous aspiration more and more of the aspect of an imperative necessity. Under the lurid illumination of the world war, the idea of world unification has passed rapidly from the sphere of the literary idealist into that of the methodical, practical man; and the task of an examination of its problems and possibilities upon the scale which the near probability of an actual experiment demands, is thrust upon the world.

All political and social institutions, all matters of human relationship, are dependent upon the means by which mind may react upon mind and life upon life—that is to say, upon the intensity, rapidity, and reach of mental and physical communication. In the history of mankind, the great phases seem all to be marked by the appearance of some new invention that facilitates trade or intercourse and may be regarded as the operating cause of the new phase. The invention of writing, of the wheel and the road, of the ship, of money, of printing, of letters of exchange, of joint-stock undertakings and limited liability, mark distinct steps in the enlargement of human intercourse and co-operation from their original limitations. A large part of the expansion of the Roman Empire, apart from its overseas development, may be considered, for example, as a process of road-making and bridge-building.<sup>1</sup> The Roman Empire, like the Chinese, expanded upon land to an extremity determined by the new method of road communication and sought to wall itself in at last at the limits of its range from its centres of strength. The new chapter of the human story, again that began with the entry of America and the Oceanic land upon the stage of history, was the direct outcome of that bold sailing out upon the oceans which the mariner's compass, and the supersession of the galley by the development of sails and rigging, rendered possible. The art of printing

<sup>1</sup> Even its trans-Mediterranean development was a matter of road-making combined with ship-building.

from movable types released new powers of suggestion, documentation and criticism, that shattered the old religious organization of Christendom, made the systematic investigations and records of modern science possible, and created the vast newspaper-reading democracies of to-day. The whole of history could, indeed, be written as a drama of human nature reacting to invention.

And we live to-day in a time of accelerated inventiveness and innovation, when a decade modifies the material of intercommunication, in range, swiftness, and intensity alike, far more extensively than did any century before. Within the present century, since 1900, there have been far more extensive changes in these things than occurred in the first ten centuries after Christ. The automobile has raised the limit of possible road travel from ten or twelve to forty or fifty miles an hour, wireless telegraphy and the aeroplane have abolished such things as inaccessible regions, and instead of regarding *Around the World in Eighty Days*<sup>1</sup> as an amazing feat of hurry, we can now regard a flight about the globe in fifteen or sixteen days as a reasonable and moderate performance. The teaching of history compels us to recognize in these new facilities factors that will necessarily work out into equally revolutionary social and political consequences. It is the most obvious wisdom to set ourselves to anticipate as far as we can, so as to mitigate and control, the inevitable collisions and repercussions of mankind that are coming upon us. Even if we were to suppose that this rush of novel accelerating contrivances would be presently checked—and there is little justification for any such supposition—it would still behove us to work out the influence that the things already achieved will have upon our kind. And it is not simply an increase of range and swiftness we have to consider here, though these are the aspects that leap immediately to the eye. There has also

<sup>1</sup> This book by Jules Verne was first published in 1872.

been, for example, a very great increase in the possible vividness of mental impact. In education and in the newer agencies of journalism and propaganda, there has been an increase of power at present incalculable, owing to vast strides in the printing of pictures, and to the cinematograph, the gramophone, and such-like means of intense world-wide information and suggestion.

And while all these things, on the one hand, point plainly now to such possibilities of human unification and world unanimity as no one could have dreamt of a hundred years ago, there has been, on the other hand, a change, an intensification, of the destructive processes of war, that opens up a black alternative to this pacific settlement of human affairs. The case, as it is commonly stated in the propaganda literature for a League of Nations, is a choice between, on the one hand, a general agreement on the part of mankind to organize a permanent peace, and, on the other, a progressive development of the preparations for war and the means of conducting war that must ultimately eat up human freedom and all human effort, and, as the phrase goes, destroy civilization. We shall find as we proceed that these simple oppositions do not by any means state all the possibilities of the case; but for a moment or so it will be convenient to confine our attention to this enhancement of the cost, burthen, and destructiveness of belligerence which scientific and technical progress has made inevitable.

What has happened is essentially this, that the natural limitations upon warfare that have existed hitherto appear to have broken down. Hitherto there has been a certain proportion between the utmost exertion of a nation at war and the rest of its activities. The art and methods of war have had a measurable relation to the resources of the community as a whole, so that it has been possible for nations to be well armed by the standards of the time and yet remain vigorous and healthy communities, and to wage

successful, and even unsuccessful, wars without exhaustion. To take a primitive example, it was possible for the Zulu people under King Chaka to carry warfare as it was then understood in South Africa, a business of spearmen fighting on foot, to its utmost perfection, and to remain prosperous and happy themselves, whatever might be the fate they inflicted upon their neighbours. And even the armies of continental Europe, as they existed before the great war, were manifestly bearable burthens, because they were borne. But the outbreak of that struggle forced upon the belligerents, in spite of the natural conservatism of all professional soldiers, a rapid and logical utilization of the still largely neglected resources of mechanical and chemical science; they were compelled to take up every device that offered, however costly it might be; they could not resist the drive towards scientific war which they had themselves released. In warfare the law of the utmost immediate exertion rules; the combatant who does not put in all his possible energy is lost. In four brief years, therefore, Europe was obliged to develop a warfare monstrously out of proportion to any conceivable good the completest victory could possibly achieve for either side.

We may take as a typical instance of this logical and necessary exaggeration which warfare has undergone, the case of the 'tank'. The idea of a land ironclad was an old and very obvious one, that had been disliked and resisted by military people for many years. The substantial basis of the European armies of 1914 was still a comparatively inexpensive infantry, assisted by machine-guns and field-guns and cavalry. By 1918 the infantry line is sustained by enormous batteries of guns of every calibre, firing away an incredible wealth of ammunition; its structure includes the most complicated system of machine-gun nests and strong posts conceivable; and every important advance is preceded by lines of aeroplanes and sustained by fleets of



these new and still developing weapons, the tanks. Every battle sees scores of these latter monsters put out of action. Now even the primitive tank of 1917 cost, quite apart from the very high running expenses, something between seven and ten thousand pounds. At that stage it was still an expedient on trial and in the rough. But its obvious corollary in movable big-gun forts with ammunition tenders—forts which will probably be made in parts and built up near to the point of use, however costly they may be—is practically dictated if war is to continue. So, too, is a production of light and swift types of tank that will serve many of the purposes of cavalry. They will be a mechanical cavalry, more effective but vastly more costly. If war is to continue as a human possibility, this elaboration of the tank in scale and species follows inevitably. A mere peace of the old type is likely to accelerate rather than check this elaboration. Only a peace that will abolish the probability of war from human affairs can release the nations from the manifest necessity of cultivating the tank, multiplying the tank and maintaining a great manufacture and store of tanks, over and above all the other military plant that they had to keep going before 1914. And these tanks will supersede nothing—unless perhaps, to a certain extent, cavalry. The tank, growing greater and greater and more numerous and various, is manifestly therefore one new burthen—one of many new burthens—which must rest upon the shoulders of mankind henceforth, until the prospect of war can be shut off from international affairs. It is foolish to ignore these grimly budding possibilities of the tank. There they are, and they cannot be avoided if war is to go on.

But the tank is only one of quite a multitude of developments, which are bound to be followed up if the modern war process continues. There is no help for it. In every direction there is the same story to be told of an unavoidable elaboration of the means of war beyond the scale of any

conceivable war-end. As a second instance let us take the growth in size, range, and destructiveness of air war. Few people realize fully what a vast thing the air service has become. A big aeroplane of the raider type may cost anything up to twenty thousand pounds,<sup>1</sup> the smallest does not cost much less than a thousand; the pilot and the observer are of the very flower of the youth of the country, they have probably cost society many thousands of pounds worth of upbringing and education, and they have made little or no productive contribution to human resources. And these costly units have been multiplied enormously. From a poor hundred or so of aeroplanes at the outset of the war, Great Britain alone has expanded her air forces until she has an output of thousands of new machines a month, aerodromes abound throughout the country, and there is scarcely a corner of England where the hum of the passing aeroplane is not to be heard. Now all this vast plant of aeroplane factories and instruction aerodromes must be kept up, once it has been started, war or no war, until war is practically impossible. It may be urged perhaps that during a peace-spell some portion of this material may be applied to civil air transport; but the manufacturers have made it abundantly clear that this project does not strike them as reasonable or desirable; their industry has been created as an armament industry, and an armament industry they wish it to remain. And besides this opposition of the interested profiteer, we have to remember that the aeroplane has imported possibilities of surprise into warfare hitherto undreamt of. So long as a sudden declaration of war, or an attack preceding a declaration of war, is possible, it is now imperative, not only that the air force of a country should be kept always in striking condition, but that the whole immense organization of coastal and frontier anti-aircraft defences should be equally ready. Tens of thousands of men, most of them economically

<sup>1</sup> e. g. the Porte flying boat with its 2,000 h.p. engines.

very valuable men, will have to keep watch day and night, prepared at any moment to flash into warfare again.

The same story of a tremendous permanent expansion of war equipment could be repeated in a score of parallel instances drawn from the land war and sea war. Enormous new organizations of anti-submarine flotillas, of mine-field material and its production, of poison gas manufacture and the like, have, for instance, been called into existence, and must now remain as going concerns so long as war is likely to be renewed. But enough examples have been cited here to establish the reality of this present unrestricted, illimitable, disproportionate growth of the war process in comparison with all other human processes. Mars has become the young cuckoo in the nest of human possibilities, and it is—to state the extreme alternatives—a choice now before mankind whether it will drift on towards a catastrophe due to that overgrowth, or so organize the world as effectually to restrain and reduce warfare.

It is not impossible to adumbrate the general nature of the catastrophe that threatens mankind if war-making goes on. Modern warfare is not congenial to the working masses anywhere. No doubt the primitive form of warfare, a murderous bickering with adjacent tribes, is natural enough to uneducated men; but modern warfare, and still more the preparation for it, involves distresses, strains, and a continuity of base and narrow purpose, quite beyond the patience and interest of the millions of ordinary men who find no other profit in it but suffering. The natural man is more apt for chaotic local fighting than for large-scale systematic fighting. Hatred campaigns and a sustained propaganda are needed to keep up the combatant spirit in a large modern state, even during actual hostilities; and in the case of Russia we have a striking example of the distaste a whole population may develop for the war strain, even during the war and with the enemy at its gates.

What is likely to happen, then, when the working masses of central and western Europe, no longer sustained by the immediate excitement of actual war, find themselves still obliged to go on, year after year, producing vast masses of war material, pledged to carry a heavy burthen of war-loan rentiers on their backs, and subjected to an exacerbated conscription? Possibly so far as the rentier burthen upon the worker goes, a great rise in prices and wages will relieve the worker to some extent, but only at the cost of acute disappointment and distress at another social level. There is a dangerously narrowing limit now to the confidence of the common man in the intelligence and good faith of those who direct his affairs; and the probability of a cruel, confused class war throughout Europe, roughly parallel in its methods to the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, and released by a similar loss of faith in leaders and governments, appears at the end of the vista of waste of directive energy and natural resources, and completing that waste of directive energy and natural resources into which the military systems of Europe, the German Empire being the chief and foremost, have led mankind. Systematic force, overstrained and exhausted, will then give place to chaotic force, and general disorganization will ensue. Thereafter the world may welter in confusion for many generations, through such ruinous and impoverished centuries as close the Roman Imperial story, before it develops the vitality for an effective reorganization.

That, roughly, is the idea of the phrase 'downfall of civilization' as it is used in such discussions as these. It is a vision of the world as a social system collapsing chaotically, not under the assault of outer barbarians, but beneath the pressure of this inevitable hypertrophy of war.

## II

### INTERMEDIATE POSSIBILITIES

LET us now look a little more closely between the two extremes of possibility we have stated in the preceding section, between a world unanimity for peace on the one hand—Everyman's World League of Nations—and a world collapse under the overgrowth of war organization and material on the other.

First, we have to consider the possibility of some belligerent state achieving so much victory as to establish a world hegemony and a peace based on force, and then relieving the pressure by an enforced and controlled world disarmament. We should then have a sort of League of Nations project, realized in a very different form and spirit indeed from that League of Everyman, but still realized, as the dictated peace of a subjugated world, rather after the pattern of the Roman Empire. Such was probably the hope, and a not altogether unreasonable hope, having regard to the self-confidence of the German people, the rottenness of Russia, the Irish disorders, and the unpreparedness of America, of many far-seeing Germans in the early phases of the war. But the affairs of the world are now in a posture which enables us to dismiss this idea of a world hegemony for Germany, or for any other single power, as a fantastic vanity.

We have to consider, however, the much greater probability of a group of the more powerful states, including perhaps a chastened Germany, agreeing among themselves to organize and enforce peace in the world for ever. This

would give us yet a third type of a League of Nations, which we may call the League of the Senior States. It is perhaps the most probable of all the intermediate possibilities.

And on the other hand we have assumed quite crudely in § 1 that the forces of popular insurrection are altogether destructive of organization, whereas there may be as yet unmeasured constructive and organizing power in the popular mind. There is a middle way between a superstitious belief in unguided democracy and a frantic hatred of it. Concurrently, for example, with the earlier phases of Bolshevik anarchy in Petrograd and Moscow, there seems to have been for a time a considerable development of co-operative production and distribution throughout European and Asiatic Russia. Mingled with much merely destructive and vindictive insurrectionism, there may be a popular will to order, reaching out to co-operate with all the sound and liberal forces of the old system of things. We can only guess as yet at the possibilities of a collective will in these peasant and labour masses of Europe which now read and write and have new-born ideas of class action and responsibility. They will be ill-informed, they may be emotional, but they may have vast reserves of common sense. Much may depend upon the unforeseeable accident of great leaders. Nearly every socialist and democratic organization in the world, it is to be noted, now demands the League of Nations in some form, and men may arise who will be able to give that still quite vague demand force and creative definition. A failure to achieve a world guarantee of peace on the part of the diplomatists at a peace conference may lead, indeed, to a type of insurrection and revolution not merely destructive but preparatory. It is conceivable. The deliberate organization of peace, as distinguished from a mere silly clamour for peace, may break out at almost any social level and in the form either of a constructive and adaptive, or of a revolutionary, project.

We have not therefore, here, a case of a clear-cut choice of two ways; there is a multitude of roads which may converge upon the permanent organization of a world peace, and an infinitude of thwarting and delaying digressions may occur. Complicating and mitigatory circumstances may, and probably will, make this antagonism of war and peace a lengthy and tortuous drama. The collapse of Russia tempted Germany to outrageous aggressions upon her Eastern frontier, and so brought out the opposition of a militarist and pacifist conception of life, with the acutest, most illuminating simplicity. But other such collapses may not have this effect of simplifying and enforcing the issue. They may merely encourage powers adjacent to the region of collapse, to adopt a partial disarmament, a mere resting phase, and so defer for scores of years, by this temporary mitigation, the necessity for securely ending war. There may be many such halts and set-backs in the inevitable development of war; militarism may pause and take breath on several occasions before its ultimate death-flurry.

Such delays, such backwater phases and secondary aspects, must not confuse the issue and hide from us the essential fact of the disappearance of any real limitation upon the overgrowth of war in human life. That unlimited overgrowth is the probability which is driving more and more men to the study and advocacy of this project of a League of Nations, because they are convinced that only through a counter-organization of the peace-will in mankind can the world be saved from a great cycle of disasters, disorder, and retrogression.

And it does not follow, because the origins and motives of the will for such a world league are various, that they involve a conflict upon essentials as to the character of the final result. It is the declared belief of many of the promoters of the world-league movement that a careful analysis of the main factors of its problems, a scientific examination

of what is possible, what is impossible, what is necessary and what is dangerous, must lead the mass of reasonable men in the world, whatever their class, origins, traditions and prejudices, to a practical agreement upon the main lines of this scheme for the salvation of mankind. It is believed that the clear, deliberate, and methodical working out of the broad problems and riddles of the world-league idea will have a sufficient compelling force to bring it within the realm of practical possibility.



### III

#### THE MIRAGE OF 'LIMITED' WARFARE

AT this point it is advisable to take up and dispose of a group of suggestions which contradict our fundamental thesis, which is that war is by its nature illimitable. War is, we hold here, a cessation of law, and in war, therefore, it is impossible to prevent permanently the use of every possible device for injury, killing and compulsion that human ingenuity can devise or science produce. War laughs at conventional trammels.

But there are people who do not accept as a fact the illimitable nature of war. They fall back upon the theory that the horrors of the great war were due to a sort of accidental relapse into savagery on the part of the German people, and that future wars can and will be conducted under restrictions imposed by humanity and chivalry. They believe that war can become a conventional Ordeal by Battle, in which the nations shall deliberately refrain from putting forth their full strength, and shall agree to abide by the decision of a struggle between limited armies, operating, like the champions in a tournament or a prize-fight, under an accepted code of rules.

This is, we hold, a delusion. Our case is that the nations can far more easily agree to abolish war than to restrict war.

It is true that, in the Great War, Germany has carried her theories of ruthlessness to self-defeating extremes. She has done many deeds which recoiled upon herself—deeds inspired by a sort of ferocious pedantry, which inflicted

comparatively small material damage upon the Allies, but hardened their resolution and brought thousands, nay, millions of recruits to their ranks. None the less must we face the fact that, individual stupidities apart, the German theory of war is the only logical one. The theory is laid down by Clausewitz at the very beginning of his classical treatise *On Wars*:

‘Philanthropists may think it possible that the disarmament or subjection of the enemy can be effected by some artificial means, without causing too many wounds, and that this is the true aim of all military science. Pretty as that looks, we must refute the error, for, in such dangerous matters as war, errors arising from good-nature are the worst of all. As the employment of physical force to its fullest extent in nowise excludes the co-operation of intelligence, it follows that he who makes use of this force ruthlessly, and without sparing blood, must obtain an ascendancy if the enemy does not do likewise. By so doing he frames a law for the other, and thus both strain every nerve, without finding any other limitation than their own natural counterpoise.’

The same principle is re-stated by Von der Goltz in *The Nation in Arms* (English translation, p. 22):

‘If, from humanitarian principles, a nation decided not to resort to extremities, but to employ its strength up to a given point only, it would soon find itself swept onward against its will. No enemy would consider itself bound to observe a similar limitation. So far from this being the case, each would avail itself of the voluntary moderation of the other to outstrip him at once in activity.’

If it be said that, in past times, this was not true—that nations fought with comparatively small armies, and often accepted defeat without having thrown anything like their full strength into the struggle—the objection is met by a twofold answer. Firstly, the logic of war, the law, as we have termed it, of the utmost effort, had not yet been thoroughly thought out. Primitive peoples in general—and the same applies to all but the most civilized and

sophisticated of modern states—are guided in matters of war and peace more by their emotions than their reason. They are lazy, as peoples, and muddle-headed. They fight because they are angry, they stop because they are tired, they cease pursuing the enemy because they want to attend to the harvest. It is the mark of a highly organized and intellectualized government to subordinate national emotions to the remorseless logic of the case. And the logic of war was reserved for Napoleon to express in practice and Clausewitz to formulate in theory. But the second answer goes more to the root of the matter, namely, that the strength which a nation can put into the field is limited by many conditions, both material and psychological, and that, if we examine into these conditions, we shall often find that what may seem to us, on the face of it, an insignificant effort, was in very truth the greatest of which, at the given moment, the nation was capable. It is a quite new social fact, a creation of the last fifty years, to have a central government supplied with exact information about all its resources in men, money, and material, and with means of organization and control which enable it, at the cost of some delay and friction, to exploit those resources to the last inch. When Babylon was captured by the Medes, we are told, there were parts of the city itself which were unaware of the fact for several days, and there must have been vast islands of population in the country which, as far as their personal experience went, never knew. But that sort of thing has passed.

If we look into the history of warfare, we find that it has completed a cycle and is now returning to its starting-point. A nomadic horde of the barbarous ages was 'a nation in arms' in the full sense of the word. Having no fixed place of abode, it had no civil, as distinct from military, population. The whole people—old men, women, and children included—took part in the toils and perils of war. There were

no places of security in which the weak and the defenceless could take refuge. Every one's life was forfeit in case of disaster ; therefore every one took part in the common defence. Modern warfare, with its air-fleets, its submarines and its ' big Berthas ', is more and more restricting the area of immunity from military peril, and reverting to these primitive conditions.

Agricultural life and city settlements brought with them the distinction between combatants and non-combatants ; but still, in the normal state, every able-bodied citizen was a soldier. The citizen took his place as a matter of course in the militia of his country, leaving to old men and women or to slaves and captives the guardianship of field and vineyard, flock and herd. Only when wealth and luxury had reached a certain pitch did the habit of employing denationalized mercenaries creep in. Then came the time when the mercenaries encountered nomadic or thoroughly mobilized ' nations in arms ', and civilization went to the wall.

In the Middle Ages, the feudal chief, the dominant, soldierly, often predatory personality, gathered his vassals (' Gesellen ' companions) around him for purposes of offence and defence, while the cultivation of the soil devolved on the villeins or serfs. Thus war became the special function of a military caste, and, as in the Wars of the Roses, campaigns were often carried on with comparatively little disturbance to the normal life of the country. When the royal power crushed or absorbed that of the barons, the centralized monarchy everywhere recruited a standing army, often consisting largely of foreign mercenaries, as the bulwark of its security and the instrument of its will. It was quite natural that dynastic wars, and wars in which the common people of the contending nations had little or no interest, should be fought out on a restricted scale, by these specialized military machines. Frederick the Great employed a mercenary army as the nucleus for a national militia ; and

so lately as the beginning of the last century this system was celebrated as ideal by a noted military authority, Friedrich von der Decken, the immediate predecessor of Clausewitz.

With Napoleon came the Nation in Arms; and the military history of the intervening years has consisted of the ever completer concentration upon warlike purposes of the whole powers and resources of the great European peoples.

If it be asked why this logical evolution of the idea of war has taken so many centuries to work itself out, the main reason (among many others) may be stated in two words: munitions and transport. Before the age of the machines it was impossible to arm and clothe immense multitudes of men; before the days of Macadam and Stephenson, it was impossible to move such multitudes and still more to keep them supplied with food and munitions. Again, we find ourselves insisting upon the vital importance of transit methods in this, as in nearly all questions of human interaction. The size of armies has steadily grown with the growth of means of communication. The German wars of 1863-70 were the first European wars in which railways played any considerable part, and the scale of operations in 1870-71 was quite unprecedented. What is the chief new factor since the days of St. Privat and Sedan? 'The aeroplane', most people would reply; possibly it may become so, but thus far a less picturesque invention has been of even greater influence—the motor lorry. No one can go anywhere near the Western Front without realizing that the gigantic scale of this struggle is almost wholly dependent upon motor traction. Had not the internal-combustion engine been invented, the war would probably have been over long ago, and at all events millions of men would still be alive and well who now lie dead or crawl mutilated over the face of the earth.

Seen in this light, the invention of the motor may appear to have been due to a special interference of Satan in human affairs. But that is an unphilosophical view to take. Our race must perfect its power over matter before it can wisely select the ends to which it will apply that power. The idea of war had to work itself out to the full and demonstrate its own impossibility, before man could find the insight and the energy to put it behind him and have done with it. Thanks to Prussian ambition and Prussian philosophy, the demonstration has now been completed. The idea of war has revealed itself in its full hideousness. All the world has come to look upon it as a sort of mythological monster which, if left to itself, will periodically re-emerge from hell, to devour the whole youth and the whole wealth of civilized mankind. It is useless to dream of clipping the wings or paring the claws of the dragon. It must be slain outright if it is not to play unthinkable havoc with civilization; and to that end the intelligence and the moral enthusiasm of the world are now, as we see, addressing themselves.

The idea of paring the claws of the dragon and rendering him comparatively innocuous has long hovered before simple and idealistic minds. Many people have said to themselves, like Jeannette in the touching old ballad:

If I were King of France, or, still better, Pope of Rome,  
I'd have no fighting men abroad, no weeping maids at home—

All the world should be at peace, or, if kings must show  
their might,

Then let those who make the quarrels be the only men  
to fight.

But even Jeannette evidently realized that the idea of making the fate of a tribe or a nation depend upon the fortunes of one or two selected champions was but a pious aspiration, which not even the King of France or the Pope of Rome could translate into practical politics. Though the nations may not, until recent times, have *learnt how* to bring their

full strength to bear for purposes either of aggression or defence, the idea of a deliberate restriction of military effort, by mutual consent, with a view to minimizing the horrors of war, belongs rather to legend than to sober history. It is true that the story of the Horatii and the Curiatii meets every schoolboy in the first pages of his Livy; but it is manifestly a fable. On the other hand, the tale told by Herodotus concerning the Lacedaemonians and the Argives at Thyrea, seems to be accepted as historical; but it only shows us the breakdown of such an experiment. Thus it runs:

‘The Argives collected troops to resist the seizure of Thyrea, but before any battle was fought, the two parties came to terms and it was agreed that three hundred Spartans and three hundred Argives should meet and fight for the place, which should belong to the nation with whom the victory rested. It was stipulated also that the other troops on each side should return home to their respective countries, and not remain to witness the combat, as there was danger, if the armies stayed, that either the one or the other, on seeing their countrymen undergoing defeat, might hasten to their assistance. These terms being agreed upon, the two armies marched off, leaving three hundred picked men on each side to fight for the territory. The battle began, and so equal were the combatants that at the close of the day, when night put a stop to the fight, of the whole six hundred only three men remained alive, two Argives, Alcanor and Chromius, and a single Spartan, Othryadas. The two Argives, regarding themselves as the victors, hurried to Argos. Othryadas, the Spartan, remained upon the field, and, stripping the bodies of the Argives who had fallen, carried their armour to the Spartan camp. Next day the two armies returned to learn the result. At first they disputed, both parties claiming the victory, the one because they had the greater number of survivors; the other, because their man remained on the field, and stripped the bodies of the slain, whereas the two men of the other side ran away. But at last they fell from words to blows, and a battle was fought, in which both parties suffered great loss, but at the end the Lacedaemonians gained the victory.’

Whether true or not, this story is illuminating. It shows that the Prussian theory of war, as a form of activity which cannot be subjected to contractual limits, is based on fundamental facts of human nature. Where the matter at stake is, or is conceived to be, of vital moment, no nation or tribe will ever accept a defeat which it knows, or hopes, that it can repair. Effort, no doubt, will generally be proportioned to the real or fancied importance of the point at issue. If England had been unable to live without her American colonies, she would probably have put forth her strength and quelled the revolt. She did not do so because her conscience was uneasy, her purpose infirm, and her interests not vitally involved—she could get on very well without the thirteen commonwealths. But it is one thing to sit down under a defeat because victory would not be worth its price; quite another thing to do so because the nation has contracted in advance to restrict its effort within certain definite limits. And the principle is the same whether the selected champions are three, or three hundred, or three hundred thousand. If the procedure were reasonable at all, it would be the more reasonable the smaller the force employed.

There is one theory, indeed, which, if we accept its initial postulate, would make limited warfare logical. If battle be regarded as the trial of a cause before the judgement-seat of God, there is no sound reason for pouring huge armies into it. It is manifest that God can deliver his verdict in the result of a duel of one against one, quite as well as in the result of a war between whole nations in arms. On this theory, war would be an extension to politics of the 'wager of battle' between individuals—a method of obtaining a supernatural ruling, indistinguishable in principle from the drawing of lots or tossing of a coin. But although men have always talked, and still talk, of 'appealing to the God of Battles', they have never shown any disposition to accept, save at the last



gasp, a judgement which ran counter to their passions or their cupidities. Whatever may have been their professions, their practical belief has always been that 'God is on the side of the big battalions', or, in other words, that war is a part of the natural order of things, the immeasurable network of cause and effect, and no more subject to special interventions of Providence than commerce or navigation, or any other form of human activity. Nor is there any reason to suppose that they will ever believe otherwise. If it be difficult to conceive them, in their disputes, abiding by the awards of impartial reason, it is a hundred times more difficult to conceive them accepting the wholly unreasonable awards of artificially and arbitrarily restricted violence.

These truths are so obvious that it may seem idle to insist upon them. Nobody, it may be said, proposes that Paris and Berlin should in future settle their disputes, like Rome and Alba Longa, by selecting three champions apiece and setting them to cut each other's throats. In this crude and elementary form, indeed, the proposal does not appear; but disguised applications of the same principle are constantly commended in the writings of those who, holding war to be eternally inevitable, seek refuge from sheer despair in the belief that it is possible to subject it to rule and limit, and say to it, 'Thus far shalt thou go and no further'. They cannot or will not see that any conventional limitation is foreign to its very essence. It is perfectly possible and consonant with human nature that nations should agree not to appeal to force, and should hold to that agreement even when one or other of them believes itself to have suffered injustice. But it is utterly impossible and inconsistent with human nature that, having appealed to force, they should agree to exercise it only within limits, and accept impoverishment, humiliation, servitude—in a word, defeat—rather than transgress the stipulated boundaries.

It may be objected that codes of law have in fact been

devised for the partial humanization of war, and that not until the present time has any civilized belligerent made a practice of disregarding them. But these so-called laws of war have always been conventions of mutual advantage—rules which all parties held it to be, on the whole, to their own interest to observe. The German War Book quite frankly places the chief sanction of such trammels upon military action, not in humanity, but in the fear of reprisals. We do not deny that man is an emotional being, and even in the midst of his fiercest fighting there are horrors from which the decent man, and even the decent multitude, instinctively recoils. Decent men do not as a rule want to hurt their wounded prisoners, they rather like to pet them; and they regard people who do otherwise as blackguards. And no doubt it is largely these emotional mercies and generosities which have brought about those rules of chivalry or scruples of religion which form the supposed 'redeeming features' of war. But the necessities of war completely override all such weaknesses as soon as they begin to endanger actual military interests. And the logic of war only tolerates them as cheap concessions to a foolish popular psychology. It must be remembered that undisguised atrocities on a stupendous scale—such, for instance, as the massacre in cold blood of whole regiments of helpless prisoners—would be too strong for the stomach of even the most brutalized people, and would tend to bring war into discredit with all but its monomaniac votaries. If we look into the matter closely enough we shall find that all Geneva Conventions and such palliative ordinances, though excellent in intention and good in their immediate effects, *make ultimately for the persistence of war as an institution*. They are sops to humanity, devices for rendering war barely tolerable to civilized mankind, and so staving off the inevitable rebellion against its abominations.

## IV

### THE SURVIVAL OF THE UNFITTEST

CRITICISMS of the project of a League of Nations have consisted hitherto very largely of the statement of difficulties and impediments, rather than rejection of the project. All such criticisms are helpful in so far as they enable us to map out the task before us, but none are adequate as conclusive objections. Few of the advocates of an organized world peace fail to recognize the magnitude of the task to which they invite men to set themselves. But their main contention is that there is really no alternative to the attempt but resignation to long years of human suffering and disaster, and therefore that, however difficult the enterprise may be, it has to be faced. The recital of the difficulties is, they say, a stimulus to thought and exertion rather than a deterrent. A man who has to leap on to a blanket from the upper story of a burning building is not likely to be restrained from jumping by being told of the possibilities of breaking his leg or doing himself a grave injury; a man who has to swim ashore from a sinking ship is not likely to give up his purpose because there may be sharks in the water. And such is the desperate position of mankind. If the warning should induce the man in the former case to jump carefully with bended knees, and if in the latter case it should induce him to scan the water shrewdly and swim more swiftly, then these comments are all to the good. But not if they paralyse his will.

The examination of how particular difficulties may be solved and how impediments may be overcome or circumvented belongs to the systematic study of the world-league

project in detail, and will not be attempted in this general introduction to the subject. But there are certain objections to the undertaking as such that must be taken up and dealt with in a preliminary discussion.

There is first an objection which it will be convenient to speak of as the *Biological Objection*. It is stated in various forms, and it peeps out and manifests itself in the expressed thoughts and activities of quite a number of people who do not seem to have formulated it completely. But what many of these objectors think, and what still more feel, may be expressed in some such phraseology as this that follows:

Life is conflict and is begotten of conflict. All the good qualities of life are the result of the tragic necessities of survival. Life, stripped down to its fundamental fact, is the vehement urgency of individuals or groups of individuals to survive and reproduce and multiply their kind. The pressure of individual upon individual and of species upon species sharpens the face of life and is the continuing impetus and interest in life. The conception of life without war is a conception, therefore, not simply utopian, but millennial. It is a proposal that every kind and sort and type of humanity should expand and increase without limit in a small world of restricted resources. It is, in fact, absurd. It is an impossible attempt to arrest and stereotype a transient phase of human life. It is inviting paralysis as a cure for epilepsy. It is a dream of fatigued minds. Terrible as the scope and nature of human warfare has become, it has to be faced. The more destructive it is, the more rapid the hardening and evolution of the species. Life and history move cyclically from phase to phase, and perhaps such an apparent retrogression as we mean when we talk of the breakdown of civilization may be only part of a great rhythm in the development of the species. Let us gather together with our own kind, and discipline and harden ourselves,

in a heroic resolve to survive in the unavoidable centuries of harsh conflict ahead of us.

Now here is a system of objection not lightly to be brushed aside. True, the element of mutual conflict in life is often grossly overstated and the element of mutual help suppressed. Prince Kropotkin's book *Mutual Help* has shown how the successful survival of most gregarious species depends far more on the co-operation of individuals than on competition between them, and how the important struggle lies chiefly between the individual and his environment. But, though overstated, there are valid criticisms here of any merely negative League of Nations project, any mere proposal to end war without replacing it by some other collective process. There do seem to be advocates of the League whose advocacy is little more than a cry of terror at the disappearance of established wealth, the loss of wasted leisure, and the crumbling of accepted dignities. Those who have faith in the possibility of a world league are bound, just as the Socialist is bound, to produce some assurances of a control over the blind pressure of population, that may otherwise swamp the world with prolific low-grade races. They are bound to show that their schemes are compatible with a series of progressive readjustments, and not an attempt to restore and stereotype the boundaries, the futile institutions and the manifest-injustices, of the world of 1914, with only armaments abolished. They are bound to show that exceptional ability and energy will not merely have scope but fuller scope for expression, achievement, and perpetuation in the new world to which they point us, than in the old. In the years to come, as in the whole past history of life, individual must compete against individual and type against type.

But having made these admissions we may then go on to point out two fundamental misconceptions that entirely vitiate the biological argument as an argument for the

continuation of war as a method of human selection. It is falsely assumed, first, that modern war is a discriminatory process, selecting certain types as against certain other types, whereas it is largely a catastrophic and indiscriminate process; and secondly, that belligerent states are in the nature of biological units, super-individuals, which either triumph or are destroyed, whereas they are systems of political entanglement of the most fluid, confused, and transitory description. They neither reproduce their kind nor die; they change indefinitely; the children of the defeated state of to-day may become the dominant citizens of its victorious competitor in the course of a generation or so. They do not even embody traditions or ideas; France, which went into the Revolutionary wars at the end of the eighteenth century to establish the republican idea throughout Europe, emerged as an Empire, and the defeat of the Russian by the German imperialism led to Lenin's 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. The essence of success in the biological struggle for existence is preferential reproduction; whereas the modern war process takes all the sturdier males to kill and be killed haphazard, while it sends all the more intelligent and energetic girls into munition factories, substitute work, and such-like sterilizing occupations. If it prefers any type for prosperity and multiplication it is the alert shirker, the able tax-dodger and the war profiteer;<sup>1</sup> if it breeds anything it breeds parasites.

<sup>1</sup> Fifty years of over-sea war against Carthage created in Rome a new and powerful class of capitalists, the *equites*, who had made fortunes as *publicani*. Of the triumvirs who first divided the world, one, Crassus, was a capitalist who had largely made his fortune by war contracts. In the wars of Louis XIV fabulous fortunes were built up by contractors; Colbert partly fought these exploiters and partly shared with them. In the wars of the French Revolution, almost the only large fortunes that were in existence were those made by contractors, and many of Napoleon's new nobility owed their rise to the same fruitful source. See Life of Santerre, in *Vieilles Maisons, Vieux Papiers*.

The economic conditions during the seventeenth century in Germany

The vital statistics of Germany, certainly the most perfect as a belligerent of all the belligerent states engaged, show already tremendous biological injuries. Germany in the first four years of the war had lost by the fall in her birth-rate alone nearly 2,600,000 lives, approximately 40,000 per million of the population; Hungary in the same period lost 1,500,000 (about 70,000 per million); the United Kingdom 500,000 (or about 10,000 per million). Add to this loss of lives the under-nutrition of the millions that were born, and their impoverished upbringing. These things strike at the victors as well as at the vanquished. They are entirely indiscriminate as among good types and bad, while on the whole the battle-field destroys rather the good than the 'unfit for service', who remain at home to breed.

The whole process which, on a vaster scale, has brought Europe to its present plight may be seen in miniature among the tribes of the Indian frontier. Go up the Khyber Pass and stand on the ridge above Ali Masjid. In front lies a desolate valley, flanked by barren mountains under a blistering sun. On the slopes to right and left, at intervals of about a thousand yards, are oblong enclosures each with

make it difficult to speak of profiteering in our modern sense of the word during the Thirty Years' War. That war brought ruin upon the free peasants and the bourgeoisie of the towns, while it enriched the nobles and princes. Enormous sums were made by plunder, the recognized means of paying the troops. The troops were raised and equipped at the expense of the colonels, who reckoned on plunder to repay them their outlay. A peculiar institution known by the name of 'Brandschatzung' was a great source of revenue to these corps leaders. Towns that had surrendered to the enemy agreed to pay certain contributions to avoid pillage and destruction by fire. The inhabitants also purchased the protection of hostile leaders to save their lives on the surrender of a town. Money thus acquired was divided among the troops, the lion's share naturally falling to the leaders. In this manner many foreign adventurers, among them several Scotchmen, amassed huge fortunes, and settled in Germany, where their families still survive, e. g. Count Douglas.

brown walls and a little loopholed tower at one corner. These enclosures are the villages of the Pathan tribes which inhabit the valley, and in the towers are men with rifles waiting their chance to shoot man or boy who may rashly expose himself outside a neighbouring village. For all or nearly all of them are at feud with each other, and though the causes of their warfare are forgotten, it is a point of honour and pride with them never to become reconciled. Every Pathan believes, or until quite recently did believe, that manliness, patriotism, and chivalry would perish if there were no feuds. There have been, roughly, three stages in the history of these feuds. In the first they were fought with knives, daggers, and other primitive weapons, and the result may have been, as a German would argue, 'biologically good'. The fittest survived, the population was prevented from increasing beyond the number which an inhospitable soil would support, the arts of peace, such as they were, could be pursued without serious interruption. The second stage was reached when the flint-lock rifle came on the scene and took the place of knife and dagger. With this the vendetta necessarily became more of a national industry, but the weapon was short of range and irregular in its killing power, and there was still a fair chance of survival, and a certain presumption that the better or more skilful man would escape. But before the end of the nineteenth century the village marksmen had possessed themselves of Martini-Henrys and other long-range high-velocity rifles, brought from Europe by the gun-runners of the Persian Gulf. At this, the third stage, the biological merits of village warfare manifestly began to disappear. The village marksman in his mud-tower now makes the whole valley his zone of fire. Cultivation becomes impossible in the no-man's land between village and village; only behind the cover of the village wall can men sow or plough or reap, tether their cattle or graze their sheep. Every village



must be provided with a communication trench, so that its inhabitants may pass under cover to the sanctuary (guaranteed twice in a week) of the Government-protected road which runs down the centre of the valley. The question now is not whether the vendetta is biologically good, but whether the tribes can at all survive under it; and weary officials, at a loss to solve the vexed problem which they offer to the Government of India, have been heard to suggest that, if a few machine-guns could be conveyed to the village marksmen and installed in the mud-towers, there would soon be no frontier problem at all.

The question which the civilized world has now to consider is whether it can survive, or its life be more tolerable than that of these tribesmen, under a vendetta of high explosives.

So that when the biological critic says *Life is Conflict*, we reply, without traversing his premisses, that war, having ceased to be conflict in any discriminating sense, has become indiscriminate catastrophe, and that the selective processes that enlarge and enrich life can go on far more freely and effectively in a world from which this blundering, disastrous, non-selective, and even dysgenic form of wastage is banished. But we have to bear in mind that this reply puts upon those who are preparing schemes for a League of Nations the onus of providing for progress, competition, and liberty under the restraints of such a scheme.

## V

### THE STIMULUS OF WAR

IT may be worth while to take up and consider here a group of facts that are sometimes appealed to as a justification of war. It is alleged that there has been an extraordinarily rapid development of mechanical, chemical, and medical science since 1914, and a vast and valuable accumulation of experience in social and industrial organization. There has been great mental stimulation everywhere; people have been forced out of grooves and idle and dull ways of living, into energetic exertion; there has been in particular a great release and invigoration of feminine spirit and effort. The barriers set up by the monopolization of land and material by private owners for selfish ends have in many cases been broken down. There can be no denying the substantial truth in these allegations. Indisputably there has been such a release and stimulation. But this is a question of proportion between benefits and losses. And all this stir, we argue, has been bought at too great a cost. It is like accelerating the speed of a ship by burning its cargo and timbers in its furnaces. At best it is the feverish and wasteful reaping of a long accumulated harvest.

We must remember that a process may be evil as a whole while in part it is beneficial. It would be stupid to deny that for countless minds the great war has provided an enlightening excitement that could have been provided in no other way. To deny that would be to assert the absolute aimlessness and incoherence of being. But while this harvest of beneficial by-products of the war is undeniable, there is no evidence of any fresh sowing; nor, if war and

warlike preparation are to continue, does there seem to be any possibility of an adequate fresh sowing of further achievements. The root from which all the shining triumphs of technical and social science spring, we must remember, is the quiet and steadfast pursuit of pure science and philosophy and literature by those best endowed for these employments. And if the greedy expansion of the war process is to continue—and we have shown that without an organized world peace it must continue—there is nothing to reassure us of the continuance of that soil of educated public opinion, that supply of free and vigorous educated intelligence, in which alone that root can flourish. On the contrary, it is one of the most obvious and most alarming aspects of the war process that University education has practically ceased in Europe; Europe is now producing only schoolboys, and the very schools are understaffed and depleted. The laboratories of the English public schools are no longer making the scientific men of the future, they are making munitions. It is all very well for the scientific man of fifty to say that at last he has got his opportunity; but that is only a momentary triumph for science. Where now is the great scientific man for the year 1930? Smashed to pieces in an aeroplane, acting as a stretcher-bearer, or digging a trench. And what, unless we can secure the peace of the world, will become of the potential scientific men of 1950? Suppose it to be possible to carry on this present top-heavy militarist system for so long a period as that, what will have happened then to our potential Faradays, Joules, Newtons, and Darwins? They will be at best half educated; they will be highly trained soldiers robbed of their intellectual inheritance and incapable of rendering their gifts to the world. The progress of knowledge will be slowing down towards stagnation.

## VI

### PRECEDENT AND PREPOSSESSION

A CONSIDERABLE amount of opposition to the League of Nations movement may be classified under the heading of *Objections from precedent and prepossession*. The mind is already occupied by the idea of attachment to some political system which stands in the way of a world League. These objections vary very much in intellectual quality. Nevertheless even the most unintelligent demand some attention, because numerically these antagonists form very considerable masses. Collectively, in their unorganized way, they produce a general discouragement and hostility far more formidable than any soundly reasoned case against an organized world-peace.

The objection from prepossession is necessarily Protean ; it takes various forms because men's prepossessions are various ; but ' There never has been a League of Nations, and there never will be ', may be regarded as the underlying idea of most of those forms. And the objector relapses upon his prepossession as the only possible thing. A few years ago people were saying, ' Men have never succeeded in flying, and they never will '. And we are told, particularly by people who have obviously never given human nature ten minutes' thought in their lives, that world unity is ' against human nature '. To substantiate these sweeping negatives the objector will adduce a heterogeneous collection of instances to show the confusions and contradictions of the human will ; and a thousand cases of successful mass co-operations will be ignored. We are moved to

doubt at last whether human beings did ever suppress piracy, develop a railway system, or teach a whole population to read and write. If the individual objector is carefully examined it will be found at times that he is under the sway of some narrow and intense mental inhibition, based on personal habits or experiences. Some of these inhibitions, if they are traced to their source, will be found to be even absurdly narrow. The objector dislikes the idea of a world League of Nations because it is 'international', or worse, 'cosmopolitan', and he has got into the habit of associating these words with shady finance or anarchist outrages or the white-slave traffic. Or he has had uncomfortable experiences in hotels abroad, or he has suffered in his business from foreign competition. Many of the objections that phrase themselves in some such formulas as 'people will never stand it' or 'you do not understand the intensity of feeling' are indeed rather cases for Jung and Freud than for serious dialectics. But from such levels of unreasoned hostility we can ascend to much more reasoned and acceptable forms of prepossession, which must be met with a greater respect.

Most human beings are 'patriotic'. They have a quiet passionate pride in the race or nation to which they belong; an affection, often as intense as that which binds them to home and kindred, for a certain type of thought and behaviour, for a certain familiar landscape and atmosphere, for certain qualities none the less real because they are often exquisitely indefinable. Now how far does this group of feelings stand in the way of a League of Nations project? A number of vigorous speakers and writers do certainly play upon this jealousy. They point out that the League of Nations project, as it develops, involves controls by councils or committees upon which every country will see a majority of 'foreigners', and they exaggerate and intensify to the utmost the suggestion of unlimited inter-

ference on the part of these same 'foreigners' with the most intimate and sacred things.

One eloquent writer, for example, declares that the League of Nations would place us all 'at the mercy of a world police',<sup>1</sup> and another declares that the council of a League of Nations would 'own'<sup>2</sup> all our property as the British now 'own' the empire—an unfortunate parallel if we consider the amount of ownership exercised by the British Government over the life and affairs of a New Zealander or a Canadian.

Perhaps the most effective answer to this sort of thing is to be found in current instances. One might imagine from these critics that at present every government in the world was a national government; but in spite of such instances as Sweden or France, national governments are the exception rather than the rule. There are very few nationalities in the world now which are embodied in a sovereign Government. There is no sovereign state of England, for example. The English, the Scotch, the Welsh, all strongly marked and contrasted nationalities, live in an atmosphere of mutual criticism and cordial co-operation. Consider again the numerous nations in the British Empire which act in unison through the Imperial Government, imperfect and unrepresentative as it is; consider the dissolving nationalities in the American melting-pot; consider the Prussians and Saxons in the German Empire. What is there in common between an Australian native, a London freethinker, a Bengali villager, a Uganda gentleman, a Rand negro, an Egyptian merchant, and a Singapore Chinaman, that they should all be capable of living as they do under one rule and one peace and with a common collective policy—and yet be incapable of a slightly larger co-operation with a Frenchman, a New Englander, or a Russian? The Welshman is perhaps the

<sup>1</sup> H. Belloc.

<sup>2</sup> Ian D. Colvin.

best instance of all, to show how completely participation in a great political synthesis is compatible with intense national peculiarity and self-respect.

But if one looks more closely into the objections of these anti-foreign alarmists, it will usually become clear that the real prejudice is not a genuine patriotism at all; the objection is not to interference with the realities of national life, but to interference with national aggression and competition, which is quite a different thing. The 'British' ultra-patriot, who begins by warning us against the impossibility of having 'foreigners' interfering in our national life, is presently warning us against the interference of 'foreigners' with 'our' empire and 'our' predominant overseas trade, which are altogether different matters.

It is curious to see in how many instances certain conventional ideas, never properly analysed, dominate the minds of the critics of the League of Nations project. Many publicists, it becomes evident, think of international relations in terms of 'Powers', mysterious entities of a value entirely romantic and diplomatic. International politics are for them only thinkable as a competition of those Powers; they see the lives of states as primarily systems of conflict. A Power for them means the sort of thing which was brought to perfection in Europe in the eighteenth century in the Courts of Versailles, Potsdam, St. Petersburg, and St. James's, and it means nothing else in the world for them. It is in fact a conspiracy against other and competing Powers, centring round an aggressive Foreign Office, and availing itself of nationalist prejudice rather than of national self-respect. Patriotism is indeed not something that the 'Power' represents; it is something upon which the Power trades. 'Germany', 'Austria', 'Britain' and 'France', to those under the power obsession, are not the names of peoples or regions but of 'Powers' personified. When they say 'Austria' will not like this, 'France' will insist upon that,

they think, not of a people, but of a Foreign Office with a tradition and a 'policy'. To this 'Power' idea the political life of the last two centuries has schooled many otherwise highly intelligent men, and by it their minds are now invincibly circumscribed and fixed. They can disregard the fact that the great majority of men in the world live out of relation to any such government with astonishing ease. The United States, Canada, China, India, Australia, South America, for example, show masses of mankind whose affairs are not incorporated in any 'Power' as the word is understood in diplomatic jargon; and quite recently the people of Russia have violently broken away from such an idea of the State, and show small disposition to revert to it. These objectors are in fact thinking still in terms of the seventeenth and eighteenth century in Europe, a very special phase in history. The European 'Power' idea had a traceable and definable source—one finds its elementary conceptions clearly stated in Machiavelli's *Prince* and in his *Art of War*—and we may hope it draws near to the end of its influence. But the fixity of so many minds upon this old and almost entirely European idea of international politics as an affair of competitive foreign offices has its value for those who are convinced of the need of a new order of human relationships, because it shows so clearly how incompatible with the pressing needs of the present time are the European conceptions of a Foreign Office and of diplomacy as a secretive chaffering for advantages.

We may illustrate this obsession by quoting a recent article by Lord Sydenham (*Nineteenth Century*, Aug. 1918) in which he combats the League of Nations proposal by an exaggeration of the difficulties of disarmament and preposterous suggestions of secret preparation. His way of thinking of 'Powers' as the irreducible nuclei of aggression is very typical. There can be no disarmed world because some 'Power' is suddenly to flash forth like Minerva, fully



armed, from 'a dreaming peace'. And the Council of the League, for no conceivable reason, is to be caught napping.

'An army composed of contingents from the whole of the States composing the League would never reach the scene of action, and would be an unmanageable menagerie if it did. It follows that a few great Powers must always maintain large naval, military, and air forces prepared for action.'

A similar line of thought is followed by an anonymous writer in *Blackwood's Magazine* (Aug. 1918), who—suffering under this fixed idea of the invincible reality of these 'Powers' and their inflexible mentality for conflict—either cannot imagine, or pretends an entire inability to imagine, that a Power can be restrained from the most complete preparations for war under the very nose of a world council.

'Even if revolution followed defeat, and a wave of Bolshevism broke suddenly over Germany, even if a provisional Government were minded to come into a League of Nations, its accession would be but momentary. The old German spirit would revive: a Scharnhorst would be found to reconstitute the ancient army; and Germany, seeing a whole world leagued for peace, would have a better chance than she had, even in 1914, of dominating the world.'

And again:

'Modern warfare depends, as we discovered in 1914, on readiness to strike. The nation which had made up its mind to break away from the hampering restraints of the League, would take care to be efficiently prepared. Unless the armies of the League guarded every frontier every day, unless these armies were large enough to keep in subjection any possible alliance, they would be useless for purposes of defence. And if they were kept at the highest standard of practical utility, then all the manhood of Europe would be in the ranks, and the whole world would be and would remain one vast armed camp. Viscount Grey sees plainly that anything less than military intervention is of no value.

He does not realize what it would mean if the armies of the League were to stand ready always to intervene. If all the frontiers of Europe were not permanently guarded by indefinite series of pill-boxes, one State possibly, two assuredly, could tear the rules of the League to pieces, like scraps of paper, and grab from a sleeping world a defiant hegemony.'

But directly one asks, *Why* a sleeping world? this tirade dissolves into rubbish. Given a League of Nations with some sort of Council, and we have the organ and authority to watch and protest against even the first rudiments of State re-armament. It was the absence of any such council or authority before 1914 that enabled Germany to prepare war openly in the sight of her destined victims, to build obviously strategic railways to the very boundary of Belgium, for example. There was nothing in the world which had the authority to challenge her. But the primary purpose of any efficient League of Peace will be to nip militarist preparation in the bud. Instead of killing dragons, its simpler task will be to boil their eggs. There may be many struggles and crises under a World League of Nations, but the assumption that they will be on anything like the scale; of the Great War is beyond the limits of possibility.

Upon the point developed above we cannot be too clear: it is not nationality that is threatened by the League of Nations, it is this 'Power' obsession, this product of the competitive European courts of the eighteenth century which used national feeling in an entirely Machiavellian spirit. And this Power idea carries with it much more mischief than the threat of sudden war and the attendant necessities of armament. It is about the nuclei of these European 'Power' systems that the current conceptions of economic warfare and territorial exploitation have grown. It is to them that we owe the conception of peace as a phase of military preparation during which there is a systematic attempt to put rivals at an economic disadvantage. And it

will be clear that an abandonment of the idea of the world as a conflict of 'Powers' involves not merely the abandonment of ideas essentially militarist, but also the abandonment of the idea of the world as a conflict of economic systems. As we penetrate these common prepossessions of an age which is now drawing to a close, the positive as compared with the negative side of the League of Nations proposal opens out. Behind the primary negative project of 'no war' upon earth, appears as a necessary corollary a new economic phase in history, in which there will be a collective regard for the common weal of mankind. The examination and elaboration of the possibilities of economic world control, already immensely fore-shadowed by the gigantic 'poolings' that have been forced upon the nations allied against Germany, is one of the most rapidly expanding chapters in the study of the League of Nations project.

This 'Power' prepossession is held by many writers to be the primary and central antagonist of the League of Nations project. 'The Great Power idea' they say, 'that is the enemy.' They point out—and the instances we have quoted enforce the contention—that most of our statesmen, a large part of our historical and political literature, and the general mind are so saturated with 'Power' ideas, as to be totally unable to imagine the League of Nations as anything but a league of 'Powers', still with a strong undertow of Machiavellian interpretation. And this school of opinion urges a strenuous attack upon this 'Power' idea which still rules the intellectual world of Europe, as the main task of a League of Nations propaganda.

## VII

### ‘THE MORAL EQUIVALENT OF WAR’

ANOTHER considerable body of criticism hostile to the League of Nations proposal is grouped about certain moral facts. Before concluding these introductory remarks, it is advisable to discuss this, not merely in order to answer so much of it as amounts to an argument against a League of Nations, but also because it opens out before us the real scope of the proposal. There seems to be a disposition in certain quarters to under-estimate the scale upon which a League of Nations project can be planned. It is dealt with as though it were a little legal scheme detached from the main body of human life. It seems to be assumed that some little group of ‘jurists’, sitting together in a permanent conference at The Hague or in New York, will be able to divert the whole process of humanity into new channels, to overcome the massive, multitudinous, and tremendous forces that make for armed conflict and warfare among men, and to inaugurate a new era of peace throughout the world. The change we contemplate here is not to be so easily achieved. It is a project of world-politics, and there is no modest way of treating such a project. It would be better left alone than treated timidly. It is a change in which nations and political and educational systems are the counters, and about which we must think, if we are to think effectively, in terms of the wealth of nations and

millions of men. It is a proposal to change the life and mentality of every one upon earth.

Now the thought of those who direct their attention to the moral probabilities of a world peace turns largely upon the idea of 'loyalty'. They apprehend man as a creature of intense, essential egoism, who has to be taught and trained very painfully and laboriously to unselfishness, and the substitution of great and noble ends for base and narrow ones. They argue that he was in his origins a not very social creature which has been forced by its own inventions into a larger circle of intercourse. He had learnt his first unselfishness from his mother in the family group; he had been tamed into devotion by the tribe and his tribal religion; the greater dangers of a solitary life had enforced these subjugations upon him. But he still relapses very readily into base self-seeking. His loyalty to his nation may easily become a mere extension of his personal vanity; his religious faith a cloak for hatred of, and base behaviour towards, unbelievers. In times of peace and security, the great forms in which he lives do so tend to degenerate. And the great justification of war from this point of view is that it creates a phase of national life in which a certain community of sacrifice to a common end, a certain common faithfulness and helpfulness, is exacted as a matter of course from every citizen. Many are called upon to die, and all are called upon to give help and suffer privations. War gives reality to loyalty. It is the fire that makes fine the clay of solidarity. The war phase has been hitherto a binding and confirming phase in the life of communities, while peace has been a releasing and relaxing phase. And if we are to contemplate a state of the world in which there is to be no warfare, we must be prepared also, these critics argue, for a process of moral disintegration.

A well-known passage in *The Crown of Wild Olive* may be quoted in this connexion. It occurs in a lecture

Ruskin delivered to Woolwich cadets, and runs as follows :

‘When I tell you that war is the foundation of all the Arts I mean also that it is the foundation of all the high virtues and faculties of men. . . . The common notion that peace and the virtues of civilized life flourished together I found to be wholly untenable. Peace and the *vices* of civilized life only flourish together. We talk of peace and learning, and of peace and plenty, and of peace and civilization ; but I found that those were not the words which the muse of history coupled together ; that on her lips the words were—peace, and sensuality—peace, and selfishness—peace, and death. I found, in brief, that all great nations learned their truth of word, and strength of thought, in war ; that they were nourished in war and wasted in peace ; taught by war and deceived by peace ; trained by war and betrayed by peace ; in a word, that they were born in war and expired in peace.’<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In justice to the memory of Ruskin we may perhaps point out that his eulogium of war quoted above referred only to a sort of ideal war ; he was in a poetical hortatory mood ; he expressed nothing but loathing for war as it actually exists. He says, for example :

‘Now remember, whatever virtue or goodness there may be in this game of war, rightly played, there is none when you thus play it with a multitude of human pawns. If you, gentlemen of this or any other kingdom, choose to make your pastimes of contest, do so, and welcome ; but set not up these unhappy peasant pieces upon the chequer of forest and field.’

He speaks with horror of wars in which ‘the best and bravest of the poor sons of the people slay each other—not man to man, as the coupled gladiators ; but race to race, in duel of generations’. Then he proceeds :

‘If you have to take away masses of men from all industrial employment—to feed them by the labour of others—to provide them with destructive machines, varied daily in national rivalry of inventive cost ; if you have to ravage the country which you attack—to destroy, for a score of future years, its roads, its woods, its cities and its harbours—and if, finally, having brought masses of men, counted by hundreds of thousands, face to face, you tear those masses to pieces by jagged shot, and leave the living creatures countless beyond all help of surgery, to starve and parch, through days of torture, down into clots of clay—what book of

The late Professor William James found enough validity in this line of thought to discuss it very seriously. In his essay on *The Moral Equivalent of War*<sup>1</sup> he deals very illuminatingly with this question. He agrees that to relieve the consciousness of ordinary men from the probability of war, without substituting any other incentive to devotion, may be a very grave social loss. His own suggestion for giving every citizen a sense of obligation and ownership in the commonweal, for weaving the ideas of loyalty and service, that is, into every life, is to substitute the collective war of mankind against ignorance, confusion, and natural hardships for the war between man and man, to teach this not only theoretically but by the very practical expedient of insisting upon a period of compulsory state service for every citizen male or female. He proposes to solve at the same time this moral problem and an equally grave social problem, by making the unskilled or semi-skilled part of the labour in the (nationalized) mines, in the (nationalized) fisheries, in hospitals, many types of factory and so forth, a public service. Personal freedom, he insists, has always been bought, and must always be bought, by responsible participation in the toils and cares of that system of law and service which constitutes the framework of human liberty.

It would be idle to deny the substantial truth in this type of criticism of peace. But it applies only to that crude conception of peace which makes it a negative thing, a mere cessation of war, a state in which you can go where you will and not be shot at. We must realize clearly that such negative peace is not our permanent aim. It is something,

accounts shall record the cost of your work ;—what book of judgement sentence the guilt of it? That, I say, is *modern* war—scientific war—chemical and mechanical war—how much worse than the savage’s poisoned arrows !’

<sup>1</sup> *Memories and Studies* (Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1911), Chapter XI, The Moral Equivalent of War (written for and first published by the Association for International Conciliation).

of course, to have a rest from suffering and the infliction of suffering ; but it is a greater thing to be set free, and peace sets people free. It sets them free to live, to think, to work at the work that is best worth doing, to build instead of destroying, to devote themselves to the pursuit or the creation of the things that seem highest, instead of having to spend all their time in trying to avoid being killed. Peace is an empty cup that we can fill as we please ; it is an opportunity which we can seize or neglect. To recognize this is to sweep out of one's mind all dreams of a world peace contrived by a few jurists and influential people in some odd corner of the world's administrative bureaux. As well might the three tailors of Tooley Street declare the millennium in being. Permanent world peace must necessarily be a great process and state of affairs, greater indeed than any war process, because it must anticipate, comprehend, and prevent any war process, and demand the conscious, the understanding, the willing participation of the great majority of human beings. We, who look to it as a possible thing, are bound not to blind ourselves to, or conceal from others, the gigantic and laborious system of labours, the immense tangle of co-operations, which its establishment involves. If political institutions or social methods stand in the way of this great good for mankind, it is fatuous to dream of compromises with them. A world peace-organization cannot evade universal relationships.

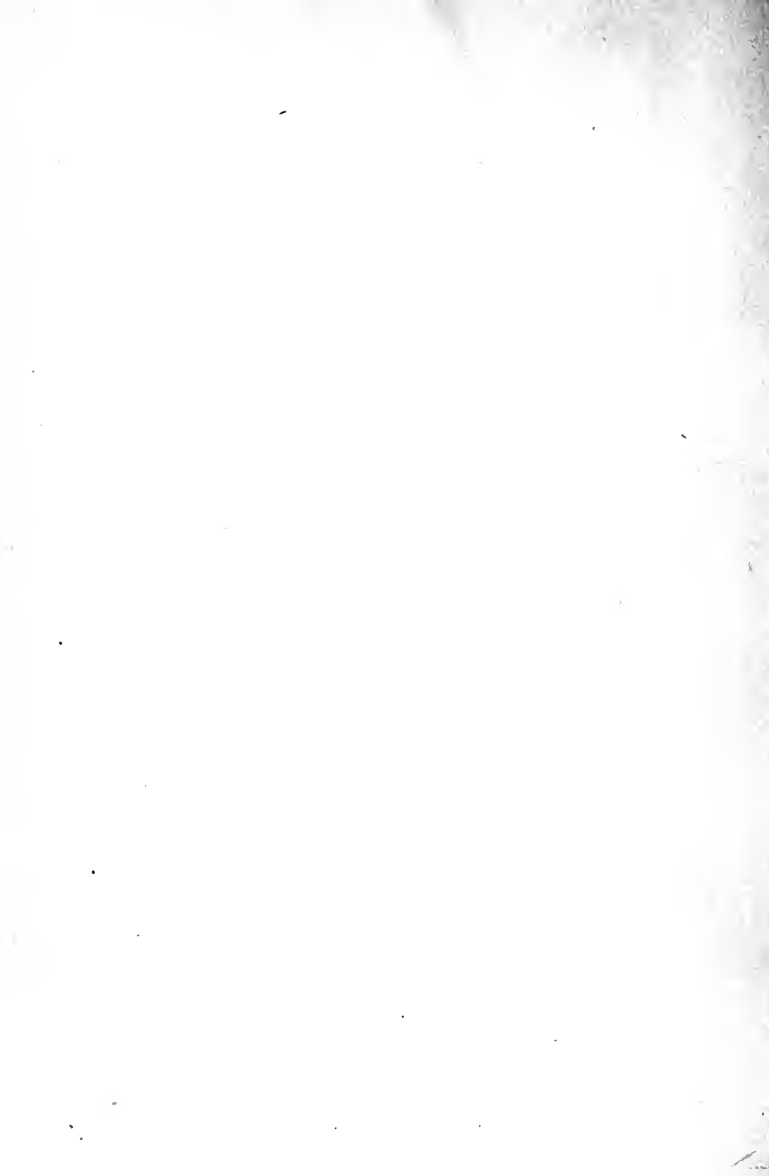
It is clear that if a world league is to be living and enduring, the idea of it and the need and righteousness of its service must be taught by every educational system in the world. It must either be served by or be in conflict with every religious organization ; it must come into the life of every one, not to release men and women from loyalty, but to demand it for itself. The answer to this criticism that the world peace will release men from service is, therefore, that the world peace is itself a service. It calls, not as war does



for the deaths, but for that greater gift, for the lives, of men. The League of Nations cannot be a little thing: it is either to be a great thing in the world, an overriding idea of a greater state, or nothing. Every state aims ultimately at the production of a sort of man, and it is an idle and a wasteful diplomacy, a pandering to timidities and shams, to pretend that the world League of Nations is not ultimately a state aiming at that ennobled individual whose city is the world.











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